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TEACHING HISTORY IN POST-COMMUNIST RUSSIA¹

Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier

The teaching of history at the secondary school level mirrors Russia's loss of epicenter. After the ignominious collapse of the Communist system and the dismemberment of their empire, Russians feel compelled to reconstruct their cultural and political identity. They need to come to terms with the existential question, "Who are we?" Is Russia part of the democratic West; is it some Eurasian mixture; or is it an entity *sui generis*, deeply rooted in Orthodox and authoritarian tradition?

A month recently spent in Moscow attending classes, talking to teachers, students, parents, administrators and publishers, left me with an acute sense of a society at the crossroads. Not only is the country's future course a matter of acrimonious debate among different political groups. Equally symptomatic, though hardly noticed in the West, are the contending interpretations of Russia's past. On this front a veritable battle for the hearts and minds of the young is in progress.

On the one side are the innovators who are devising new, forward-looking content and methodology to educate citizens of a free and democratic Russia. On the other, there are the conservatives who recoil from the challenges of pluralism and the coming century, and seek solace in resuscitating

Russian spiritual and national traditions. To an outsider their views have far too much in common with the triad of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and chauvinist Nationalism that sustained the Tsarist system. Their republication of reactionary, pre-1917 textbooks on Russian history buttresses this impression. Whereas the innovators teach history as an intellectual discipline, the conservatives teach it more as a doctrine that affirms Russia's unique identity and values.

On a third side there are those who managed to do well under the discredited regime, yet now claim to have been "closet" democrats all along. They want to cash in on their experience and connections, sensing the vast opportunities offered by the market and the inflow of foreign assistance and capital.

In short, on the microlevel of the school classroom, the strivings of these three groupings reflect the political, cultural, economic, and ethnic infighting that bedevil the country at large.

The Situation Before 1991

Any informed observer cannot objectively maintain that before 1991 history teaching in Soviet

1 I want to thank the PepsiCo Foundation for the travel grant to Moscow and the many Russian teachers and administrators for their helpful cooperation.



schools and universities was nothing but mendacious indoctrination. There were fine scholars who wrote and published excellent research monographs—albeit with the obligatory, ritual citations of Marxist-Leninist formulas in the introductory chapter. There were dedicated teachers who, without challenging the system head-on, trained their students in the critical use of primary and secondary sources. There were also courageous individuals willing to risk their careers by going beyond what was permitted. Furthermore, it was a regular practice during the Soviet period to demote insubordinate or suspect university professors to teaching at pedagogical institutes which trained the vast majority of the country's school teachers. In other words, the profession was by no means moribund prior to the demise of Communism in late 1991.

Last fall I talked to a research scholar at the Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences who had organized at Moscow State University in 1978 an Association of Young Historians to discuss alternate versions of pre-1917 Russian history. One of their meetings dealt with the ethnic-cultural pluralism of tenth- and eleventh-century Kievan Rus, based on the work of the Tatar poet, Odzhas Suleimenov. It was an attempt to go beyond the Russo- and Euro-centric orientation of official historiography. The circle was denounced and disbanded for this seemingly innocuous intellectual exercise, and its organizers had serious difficulties in obtaining from the university's Party organization the requisite political reference (*kharakteristika*) for admission to graduate studies. Such experiences killed overt initiatives for many historians until 1991.

A high school teacher from southern Russia told me that she too had loyally marched with her class during the annual October Revolution celebrations. Yet, in the late 1960s she started reading various unofficial publications, such as Andrey Sakharov's essay "Thoughts on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom," and tried to pass on some of his dissenting insights in her classroom. Eventually, during 1988-89 she co-authored a new Soviet history with a younger colleague (who had picked up her unorthodox views from foreign students at the University of Krasnodar), and they

submitted it to the state publishing house, Prosveshcheniye. It was the first history textbook to be written by practicing school teachers and not by one of the well-trusted professors.

Gorbachev's perestroika did not bypass the school system. In 1985 he appointed a new Minister of Education, Gennady Yagodin, who roused some fresh life into the system by granting greater independence to school principals and greater choice to students. Principals were encouraged to find additional sources of funding (mainly sponsors or donors) to finance improved curricula and hire better teachers. The number of obligatory courses was reduced, some electives were introduced, and the required ideological course in the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was replaced with loosely structured social science (*obshchestvennye nauki*) lectures that gave free rein to instructors. Most of them chose to turn the course into a history of philosophy, but the more adventurous souls seized the opportunity to introduce such new subjects as environmental or local history studies.

Welcome as the Gorbachev reforms were to educators, they were nevertheless promulgated from above—as I was informed on several occasions. To be sure, the reforms lightened supervision and permitted some innovations, but they did not eliminate the hierarchical control wherein final authority over textbooks and curricula rested with the center. I have examined several booklets issued during 1989-91 as teachers' aids to guide the more liberal and critical approach to history.² Basically, they closely followed the precepts of Gorbachev's "new think." (I have deliberately not used the catch phrase "new thinking," since in many respects, no matter how daring in its departures in the Soviet context, it was just another form of Orwell's "Newspeak.") Though the pamphlets dropped the pre-1985 emphasis on class struggle as the motor of history, still they presented a teleological, deterministic vision wherein human progress inexorably headed toward democratic socialism. In the same vein, they conveyed pat explanations for Gorbachev's new formulations—ranging from an "integral world" to "universal human values."

Teachers still felt the heavy hand of control and dictation, the careful doling-out of the permissible.

2 Yu. S. Borisov, *Istoriya SSSR. Materialy k uchebniku dlya devyatogo klassa sredney shkoly* (Moscow: Prosveshcheniye, 1989); A. T. Kikul'kina (ed.), *Stranitsy istorii sovetskogo obshchestva. Fakty, problemy, lyudi* (Moscow: Politicheskaya Literatura, 1989); *Materialy po izucheniyu istorii SSSR. IX klass* (Moscow: Moskovsky Gorodskoy Institut Usovershenstvovaniya Uchiteley, 1989); Yu. A. Boldarev, V. N. Piven, *Istoriya. Materialy dlya postupyushchikh v vuzy* (Krasnodar, 1990); O. I. Borodina, *Rossiia na rubezhe dvukh vekov. Sovremennyy podkhod k prepodavaniiu istorii* (Moscow: Obshchestvo "Znanie," 1991).

For example, the monthly *Teaching History at School* (*Prepodavaniye istorii v shkole*), which has been serving the profession since 1926, printed in its October 1989 issue the first objective, factual article on the role of the Orthodox Church in Russian history.³ Its author, Andrey Polonsky, told me that publication was held up because there was considerable opposition to having it printed at all (even though Gorbachev had authorized the celebration of Russia's Christian millennium the year before). When the article finally appeared, it had been extensively altered to soften the contention that Orthodoxy had played a pervasive role in Russian political and cultural life.

Ludmila Zharova and Irina Mishina, whose textbook was the first written by history teachers, also saw their manuscript censored.⁴ For example, an exercise meant to induce class discussion on whether socialism was a science or utopian thinking had to be deleted at the insistence of the editors. Two years later, the same editors informed me that the book was "outdated"—it could serve only as a "transitional" or "temporary" expedient—without, however, mentioning their own role in making it so. By implication, the blame rested on the authors, not on the self-censorship that persisted in the state publishing houses to the very last days of the Communist system.

Similarly, Igor Dolutsky, on the staff of Moscow's Institute to Improve Teachers' Qualifications, had trouble in 1989 convincing his superiors that it was essential to present, in a teachers' manual for the ninth grade, at least two contending interpretations of major events in Soviet history. These officials were simply too set in their ways: students should be presented with one explanation and not exposed to reasoning out a choice. In another booklet suggesting materials and discussion topics on Russia in the early twentieth century (written in 1990, but published in 1992), Dolutsky had to use considerable "cunning" (his word) to be able to say something positive about such pre-1917 liberals and reformers as Pavel Milyukov and Count Sergey Witte.⁵

It is easy to be critical of the so-called "new," pre-1991 teaching materials. But, one must remember, there was still an official (albeit changed) ide-

ology, an All-Union Ministry of Education that decided on texts and curricula for the entire country, and Russian/Soviet history was still bedeviled with "blank spots" or unmentionable subjects. Nevertheless, despite these drawbacks, the field was invigorated. For one, the perestroika period ended the monopoly for writing textbooks held by certain authors—for instance, Boris Rybakov (born 1908) in Russian medieval history, or Yury Kukushkin in Soviet history. In slightly revised versions their works had served millions of Soviet school children for over twenty years. Even though censorship under Gorbachev did not allow certain facts to be discussed or mentioned (for example, the secret protocols to the August 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact), the new authors could at least convey new methods of teaching history—i.e., as a subject open to different interpretations, as a process that raised various alternative explanations, and to start integrating Russian/Soviet history with that of the rest of the world, putting at end to the parochial fixation on the uniqueness and perfection of the Soviet system.

Even more important, although articles and books had to conform to Gorbachev's new formulas, discussions among school teachers could range wide and freely. Igor Dolutsky, for example, lectured in Moscow and other cities on the concepts that were deleted from the materials published by the Institute to Improve Teachers' Qualifications. The demand for and receptivity to this type of inquiry was very lively.

The New Textbooks

What is to replace the already outdated new textbooks published in 1991-92? The days when the Ministry of Education would direct its publishing house, Prosveshcheniye, to produce new books in line with the latest Party pronouncement are over. (The proper response to the political desiderata specified from above was so crucial that some reputable historians, not too adept at this sort of accommodation, would simply hire an expert on Marxist-Leninist quotations to dress up their manuscript. Even so, the publisher, I was assured, still had difficulties with the Ministry's dicta and much

3 A. Polonsky, "Vera, terpeniye, lyubov'," *Prepodavaniye istorii v shkole*, no. 5 (1989), pp. 39-46.

4 L. N. Zharova, I. A. Mishina, *Istoriya otechestva, 1900-1940* (Moscow: Prosveshcheniye, 1992). This book and the innovations it tried to introduce were discussed in *Prepodavaniye istorii v shkole*, no. 6 (1991), pp. 42-55.

5 I. I. Dolutsky, *Rossiia v nachale XX veka. Materialy k izucheniiu otechestvennoi istorii* (Moscow: Moskovsky Institut Povysheniya Kvalifikatsii Rabotnikov Obrazovaniya, 1992).

effort would be spent in the pre-1991 days "begging" or "bargaining" over the final, acceptable version. Author and editor were at the mercy of transient political needs, the decisive factor in the whole process.)

Dmitry Zuyev, now in his twenty-sixth year as director of Prosveshcheniye, made no attempt to conceal his former subordination to the Ministry and the resulting textbooks that presented tendentious, one-sided interpretations, withheld much information about Russia's past, and gave an inaccurate picture of the outside world. (Disarmingly, he told me that in the old days only a few people, like Sakharov, could afford the "luxury" of expressing their independent opinions.) Zuyev is not at all disturbed by the Ministry's loss of control over school texts and programs, or by the proliferation of small publishers to supply the growing network of alternative schools. Instead of worrying about the loss of a market that assured print runs of up to 5 million copies for some textbooks, he is challenged by the "revolution" in education that is now in full swing and eager to take advantage of the current opportunities.

This resourceful publisher admits that things are bound to be slow at first and initial changes have to be superficial. For example, the fastest way to "update" a textbook is to change its title, as was done last fall when *History of the USSR* reappeared with merely a redesigned cover as *History of the Fatherland* (*Istoriya otechestva*). But more substantive plans are under way, like the publication of slim pamphlets, which can be produced in three to six months, offering teachers new documentation and interpretations to amplify or supplant the existing aids. Zuyev is also negotiating a possible joint venture with a German company to bring out new texts with different contents, attractive color illustrations, graphs, and maps. Since the books published by Prosveshcheniye, though no longer obligatory, will carry the imprimatur of the Russian Federation's Ministry of Education, it's obvious why a foreign investor might sense a good market: given the survival of old habits and distribution networks, these texts are bound to reach more schools than those put out by the new independent houses.

Zuyev is also eager to team up with foreign authors and proudly showed me a Russian text of *Applied Economics*, produced in Princeton, New Jer-

sey, by the Junior Achievement series. He is no less pleased that the Americans waived the copyright fees. I was asked to suggest or find a similar lively, innovative (and free of charge) text on world history that could be translated: It would help end the artificial isolation of Russian history from developments elsewhere on the planet and encourage a sense of cultural diversity that had been sorely lacking in Soviet classrooms.

However, not all efforts at upper administrative and publishing echelons are so forward-looking. Pre-1917 (yes, Tsarist!) textbooks are being reissued. The Russian, not the Federal, Ministry of Education has endorsed the publication of a two-volume, attractively produced *Short Outline of Russian History* by Dmitry Ilovaisky (1832-1920),⁶ and Prosveshcheniye is about to put out a cheaper one-volume version. Ilovaisky's textbook, with the Imperial Ministry of Education's authorization, went through more than 30 editions before the October Revolution. During the last decades of Romanov rule, Russian liberals and the Empire's numerous minorities regarded Ilovaisky as the quintessential expositor of autocratic rule, intolerant Orthodoxy, and chauvinist Russification.

In answer to my persistent questioning why this particular work was chosen for the children of a free Russia, the publishers gave both economic and nationalist explanations. The hunger for "genuine" Russian history, unadulterated by any Soviet accretions, is so great, I was told, that only a book of this date and type could satisfy the need. Also, no author's fees or royalties need to be paid, and the market demand is there.

To be fair, one must add that other, less odious, pre-revolutionary versions of Russian history are also being republished. The head of Prosveshcheniye's history division, V. G. Samsonov, has put out a handsome, abbreviated two-volume version of the monumental 29-volume *History of Russia from the Most Ancient Times* by Sergey Solovyov (1820-1879). And there are plans to bring out a course of university lectures by Sergey Platonov (1860-1933), a respected pre-revolutionary scholar. Yet it was a small independent publisher who produced a photo-offset facsimile of lectures by the most liberal historian of them all, Vasily Klyuchevsky (1841-1911).⁷

6 D. I. Ilovaisky, *Kratkiye ocherki Russkoy istorii. Kurs starshego vozrasta* (Moscow: Moskovsky Fond Kul'tury, 1992).
7 V. O. Klyuchevsky, *Kratkiye posobiye po Russkoy istorii* (Moscow: Progress-Pangeya, 1992).

A variety of institutions and individuals, including foreigners, have entered textbook publishing. Undoubtedly, the Soros Foundation of New York—active in helping to create open societies in Russia and Eastern Europe—has made the most serious contribution to sponsoring new departures. In May 1992 the Soros Foundation announced in *Literary Gazette* and *School Gazette* a competition for new history textbooks. Over 700 proposals were submitted, of which a jury selected some 75 for preliminary consideration. The jury is headed by Mikhail Kuzmin, Director of the Institute of National Problems, recently set up by Russia's Ministry of Education to satisfy the educational needs of the multi-ethnic population under its jurisdiction.

In mid-November 1992, the winners of the first-round competition came to a five-day seminar held outside Moscow to hear each other's proposals, to discuss the needs of the profession, and to establish some guidelines. Representatives from the Federal Ministry of Education and Prosveshcheniye also attended, for the Foundation plans to support publication of the best manuscripts. As it turned out, what elicited the liveliest response was not the Soviet period, but other neglected or misrepresented periods and areas, such as the history of the ancient world, the history of religions and philosophy, world history, Russian and local history (including that of the small nationalities scattered throughout the Russian Federation that had been much studied by linguists and ethnographers but did not have school texts on their own past).

The appearance of Church-sponsored textbooks is as much a novelty as the Soros initiative. The Russian Orthodox Church and various Orthodox organizations are also republishing pre-1917 books, including Ilovaisky. The Russian Spiritual Center of Moscow has brought out a photo-offset facsimile of M. Ostrogorsky's illustrated *History of Russia* in its last (32nd) edition of 1913.⁸ Its present-day publishers appended the following introductory note: "The life of the ancient Slavs, princely weapons, the patterns of Old Russian costumes, Peter the Great's assemblies and his battles—all presented in a serene, almost chronicle-like style—will make us think about the greatness of the word 'Russia.'"

In addition, some churches publish inexpensive brochures on saints' lives to fill that particular "blank spot" in history. Likewise, some priests are issuing their versions of Russia's past. Father Artemy Vladimirov, for example, brought out in 1992 a small booklet, *On the Fate of Russia*.⁹ Though it purports to deal with Church history, it is not a systematic work on the subject. Rather, it is a prophesy, written in a beguiling, antiquated style, about the "new page" in the history of the Russian people, destined to save themselves and the world through sacrifice and repentance. (Father Artemy is a popular speaker as well, enchanting his audiences—young and old alike—with lectures on the same topic. A young admirer of his told me that, given the general breakdown of values, religion—especially when presented in his striking manner—gave one an assured sense of immutable principles to guide one's conduct.)

The St. Sergius of Radonezh Society, which operates several independent schools in Moscow, has a more traditional textbook on Russian history about ready for the press. Although it eschews the prophetic tone of Father Artemy, it is marked by an almost mystical appreciation of Russia's Orthodoxy and Tsarist institutions.

The new democratic educational centers are also busily presenting their versions of the past. The Russian State University of Humanities, founded in 1990-91 on the basis of Yuri Afanasyev's Archival Institute which led the early battles for the de-Stalinization of history, has issued a two-volume political history.¹⁰ It focuses not on the continuity of the autocratic tradition, but on the fortunes of the reform movements, on the attempts to turn Russia into a law-governed state. This past fall, the Open Russia University (known by its acronym as ROK) started a newspaper for teachers, aptly entitled *The First of September*—the opening day of the school year. It comes out three times a week and offers a monthly supplement devoted to history.¹¹ The supplement is careful to tread a middle ground between the nationalist and the democratic trends that contend for the allegiance of the young. On the one hand, it reprints commentary on Russian history by the philosopher Nikolay Berdyayev or the mystic Nikolay Roerikh, and provides extensive

8 M. Ostrogorsky, *Istoriya Rossii* (Moscow: Russky Dukhovnyi Tsentr, 1992).

9 Svyashchennik Artemy Vladimirov, *O sud'bah Rossii. Propoved'* (Domodedovo: Izd. Khrama Vsekh Svyatykh, 1992).

10 S. Kondratov, et al. (eds.), *Nashe otechestvo. Opyt politicheskoy istorii* (Moscow: Terra, 1991). Another two-volume text, *Istoriya otechestva. Lyudi, idei, resheniya*, attempts to stress the role of individuals and of society in history: S. V. Moronenko (ed.), *Ocherki istorii Rossii, XIX—nachalo XX v.* and V. A. Kozlov (ed.), *Ocherki istorii sovetskogo gosudarstva* (Moscow: Politicheskaya Literatura, 1991).

11 *Istoriya. Ezhenedel'noye prilozheniye k gazete "Peruoye Sentyabrya."*

illustrated material on Russian state symbols. On the other, it reviews books that argue alternate, modern interpretations, like the essays of the recently deceased liberal historian Natan Edelman or the Russian translation of the French neo-Marxist Mark Ferro's *How History is Taught All Over the World*.

New Content and Methodology

What about the actual teaching of history in the new and old schools? Schools are proliferating and they are changing. Last fall there were 100 private schools; last June about 40. There are classical *gimnaziya*, humanities lyceés and so-called historical colleges; there are private secular and religious schools; there are "national" schools, e.g., Jewish and Armenian.¹² The "old" public schools adapt their curricula to meet the challenges of the new era. For instance, one of Moscow's leading math and science high schools has recently added a social science division to provide a better-rounded, liberal education for its graduates.

Given the dismantling of controls and central supervision, almost anything goes. Some schools merely change names, others alter their programs and enlarge their teaching staff with professors from the universities or teachers' colleges (easily available, now that no one can survive on one salary). Some schools have their own housing; others merely rent space from existing state schools until they manage to build or obtain separate quarters. In the general rush for renewal, there is as yet little talk about accreditation. The only standard that still holds are the extremely demanding entrance exams to Moscow State and other top-ranking universities, which, in Russia as elsewhere, remain the goal for ambitious parents and students.

The quality of the instruction I was able to observe presents as motley a picture as does the mushrooming of schools and programs.

Some schools have gone through a pro forma change only—from a plain English-language school to a "liberal arts lyceé," for instance—without infusing either the course content or teaching methods with a fresh spirit. An example of such superficial change is a school in the southwest section of Moscow, where the teacher told her eighth-grade class in medieval Russian history that their task was first

to learn facts and dates; second, to become acquainted with different interpretations of major events. The third, highest level of historical knowledge—namely, having an opinion of one's own—was far beyond their grasp, she informed her charges. To her, pupils were an empty vessel into which the appropriate contents had to be poured. They had no right to form or express their own evaluations. And the class was conducted accordingly. The students were divided into three groups, each assigned to report on one of the contending interpretations of the founding of the first Russian state in the ninth century. When one girl piped up with her own thoughts on the subject, she was ruled out of order since her observations did not fit neatly into any of the categories that had been devised in advance.

As this incident shows, authoritarian methods of teaching persist, and they weaken the effect of any democratic transformations. There are, however, innovative individuals who combine new content with new instructional methods. They restructure the teaching process as a "partnership" in which teacher and student set out on a common voyage of discovery. They see their work as educating the free citizens of a democratic Russia who can think, analyze, and judge for themselves—a far more serious task than merely preparing students to pass exams.

I came across this changed attitude in both public and private institutions. At the prestigious School No. 57 in central Moscow, which only admits students who have passed stiff competitive exams, one teacher, Svyatoslav Kaspé, entranced his ninth-grade class with the complex story of Russia's Time of Troubles in the early seventeenth century, when the country was torn by dynastic strife, foreign invasions, and peasant revolts. Yet, despite the avalanche of facts and names, he held the students' attention through a lively presentation, by asking questions and by entertaining questions in response. The 50 minutes were filled with vivid personalities, political intrigue, and military campaigns. At the same time, Kaspé succeeded in conveying some solid insights into the political and social support that determined the success of the various contenders for power.

Even more impressive was an elective, eleventh-grade course on mythology taught by Dima Prokudin. Making use of Carl Jung's approach to the origins and functions of myth, it was a searching

12 Irina Ovchinnikova, "Proshchaniye s edinoy shkoloy," *Izvestiya*, December 7, 1992.

inquiry into the role of the unconscious and the irrational in political action and the political potency of myth-making. The class was conducted in Socratic dialogue, and the students' responses testified not just to their intelligence but equally to their readiness for this type of instruction.

The Historical College in the northern section of Moscow opened two years ago but already has a highly distinct character. Renting two floors from a public school, this private venture combines its own program—stressing foreign languages, classics, philosophy, and history—with the regular courses offered by the state school. The College's goal is to start training future history teachers in the last two grades of high school (the tenth and eleventh) and to educate them for two further years, so as to speed up their matriculation as certified teachers.

Set up by a dissident group from a Moscow pedagogical institute (which have all been recently upgraded to teachers' universities), the College prides itself on its "democratic spirit." The goals of "brotherhood and cooperation" are spelled out in a declaration gracing the bulletin board at the entrance, which also urges all to observe "kindly goodness" (*dobrota*) toward one another. This pointed departure from the authoritarianism of Soviet schools is happily embraced by the students. They invariably stressed the egalitarian spirit when I asked why they had chosen this particular school. (Like other private institutions, the College charges tuition. In fall 1992 it amounted to at least 1,600 rubles per month, a sum affordable by families with a monthly income over 10,000 rubles, the average salary then being about 6,000.)

The level and sophistication of the lectures are impressive, for most instructors come from institutions of higher learning with much expertise in their subjects. An older specialist in archaeology held her class in rapt attention while lecturing on the Sumerians and what their burial customs revealed about social structure and values. In another class, a young man expounded the history and philosophy of China and Japan. Some of the wisdom he tried to impart was way beyond his students' grasp. His reading of several haiku poems plus comments on their subtle beauty, for example, did not go over; as one student observed, "Give me Pushkin any time—that's normal poetry for me!"

While these excursions into Eastern philosophy may have been premature, another class on Russian medieval literature as a historical source obviously had an impact. In examining the epic poem *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, the teacher vividly demonstrated

the rich tapestry of Russian culture in the thirteenth century, when Christian and pagan beliefs, Slavic and steppe cultures, coexisted and intertwined. This was a rigorous textual analysis, a far cry from another class I attended at a more traditional school, where the same poem was discussed as a paean to the bravery of the early Russians, defending their land from nomadic invaders.

Finally, a few words should be said about the denominational schools. I spent a morning at one run by the St. Sergius of Radonezh Society and occupying an entire building in the far northeast outskirts of the city. It had a friendly and warm ambience, nevertheless strict discipline reigned. Girls wore no makeup, not even fancy barrettes in their hair, roll call was taken in class, and each Russian history lesson started with a prayer. (Whether by design or by oversight, the class in English history did not.) During lunch an acolyte read Scripture aloud, and two little girls chanted religious texts. In the three classes I attended, the teachers lectured most of the hour (in lower grades an assistant actually checked whether pupils were taking notes).

In this school Ilovaisky's pre-1917 *Short Outline of Russian History* is used as a text, and it seemed to me that neither content nor methodology had advanced since his day. Obviously, as in any school, the quality of instruction depends on the teacher as much as on the school's ethos. I attended two eighth-grade classes on Peter the Great. One instructor lectured on Peter's youth and character to bring out the rebellious, inquisitive nature of the future reformer, and elicited greater interest by asking students where the various places Peter had roamed were now located inside Moscow's city limits. The other teacher embellished facts on Peter's reforms with diatribes that had a strong anti-Western and anti-democratic flavor. He ridiculed Peter's penchant for replacing perfectly serviceable Russian words and institutions with foreign transplants. For example, instead of retaining the existing Russian word for a central government department, *prikaz*, or for commerce, *torgovlya*, Peter substituted *kollegiya* and *kommertsiya*. There was as well a harangue against Peter's crushing the power of the boyars and their council (*duma*)—not because the monarch did away with an early representative institution, but because any nation that "tampered with its aristocracy" courted disastrous consequences, as happened in Russia in the eighteenth century and again in 1917.

Just to check how typical of denominational schools such instruction might be, I talked to Boris

Filippov, who teaches at the Andrey Rublyov School, named after the great medieval icon painter. The school opened in 1989-90 on the initiative of concerned parents and with support from the Patriarchate. Here, the separation between religious and secular instruction is observed. Though all teachers are practicing Russian Orthodox, there is no such requirement for enrollment, and religious instruction (as well as observances) are relegated to the Sunday schools available at most of Moscow's churches. Filippov teaches history as an intellectual discipline, not as a philosophy that reaffirms Russia's unique identity or values. His students get a rigorous exposure to the critical reading of original sources, beginning with the medieval epic tales (*byliny*) in the lower grades and ending with diplomatic documents for older students. His goal is to train independent, well-informed minds, not to shape blindly loyal Russians out of youngsters deprived of their national identity during the "godless" Soviet period.

One may well ask whether teachers face more problems with new content or with new methods. My impression is that the former poses the lesser problem. From 1988 on, specialized history journals and crusading periodicals started to de-ideologize history, to bring forbidden facts to light, and to resurrect forgotten figures (especially for the post-1917 period, which was the most falsified). Furthermore, supplying new content for lectures is a fairly straightforward matter of looking up information (however hard to come by and sort out) as against altering ingrained habits of thought and long-established procedures.

Open-ended methods, however, are more difficult to adopt, especially for older people, since this requires a changed mentality. An exchange at the seminar sponsored by the Soros Foundation demonstrated the difficulties involved even for well-intentioned persons. One teacher asked Teodor Shanin (a professor of Russian history in England, who spoke about the Foundation's goals) whether he would bar from his school library a book that had nothing but criticism of the British government's policies. Shanin's reply: "Of course not! The more difficult or critical the interpretations, the better, provided they contain no racial slurs" was received as veritable revelation by quite a few in the audience, and not just teachers from the provinces. But to the young instructors from Novosibirsk (the famous "academic city" beyond the Urals), the question sounded just as naive and hidebound as it did to me.

Summing Up

A month's observation of the teaching of history in post-Communist Russia left me with mixed feelings. The pluralism, the proliferating innovations, the zest and support they have aroused cannot but be welcomed and applauded. Much of what I heard and saw is admirable. There are the generous efforts of professors from higher institutions of learning, willing to share their knowledge with school children. There is the dedication of young teachers who have foregone graduate studies in order to continue their work in the classroom at this crucial time. Especially heartening is their open-minded search for educational methods best suited to train the citizens of a democratic Russia.

Nevertheless, there are developments in the profession as a whole that give grounds for some concern.

The prevalent ethnocentrism is disturbing to an outside observer. It is evident even among the liberals grappling with the post-imperial legacies. The Russian Federation's Ministry of Education has pointedly set up a special institute to provide equitable national education for the ethnic groups and autonomous regions that honeycomb the country. It is staffed by competent persons, some of them experts in the early Soviet nationalities policies, when the subject peoples of the former Tsarist empire spoke up for their rights. The deputy director, for example, wrote her doctoral dissertation on Sultan Galiyev, a national Communist of Tatar origin, who argued in the 1920s that the nationality problems will not be solved in Soviet Russia until the Russians come to terms with their own dominant role and its consequences.

Despite the awareness and goodwill at this and other levels, I found little concern for dealing with the issue beyond supplying in due course textbooks on national histories to various minorities. I came across no one concentrating on devising methods to teach from a multicultural perspective. There was little awareness that a democratic society should not only treat all its members as equals but also strive to recognize and respect their specific cultural identities. Even in the new humanist lycees teachers were apt to lapse into the old concepts and vocabulary: such as "uniting the Russian lands" in the early Middle Ages, when in fact there was no fully formed Russian nation, or to talk about the "re-unification" of western Ukraine and western Belarus with Russia in the late eighteenth century when actual conquest was carried out. It was a

pleasure to hear a perceptive student raise the question: What is the difference between territorial expansion and unification? Her query stumped the teacher; he had no answer. And that was the end of the exchange.

A parallel ethnocentrism is displayed in Russian attitudes toward the former Soviet Muslim republics, specifically about the so-called "Asian mode of production" that is said to prevail there. The phrase was coined by Karl Marx to describe the stagnation in India and to reach the verdict that British colonial rule of the subcontinent, no matter how oppressive, did have beneficial results: it started the Indians on the road to modernization. Instructors who teach Eastern philosophy, and who would never regard themselves as Marxists, subscribe to this view and treat their subject in terms of how mysterious or different Eastern civilization is from the West's. When asked how they would explain the successful modernization of Japan or the emergence of the Asian NICs, they roll their eyes and reply that this is just another of those "inexplicable mysteries" of the East.

I came across too few people among the innovators and democrats who looked at societies as sharing common traits or cultures as enriching one another. Symptomatically, the teachers assembled at the Soros Foundation seminar to discuss post-Communist textbooks reacted with almost uniform hostility to a lecture on comparative modernization that was meant to stretch their imagination. Clearly, they were not prepared to entertain comparisons which in any way implied that in some respects Russia's modernization problems were similar to those faced in Asia or Africa by other latecomers to the process.

The loss of empire and a perceived encirclement by the potentially hostile former constituent republics has left many Russians on the defensive, with a feeling that their own, separate national identity has to be asserted first. As a short-term reaction, it is no doubt natural and understandable. Should it persist and deepen, however, such an attitude will create grave problems for peaceful coexistence, and not just with the Muslim neighbors.

The fact that pre-1917 texts enjoy such popularity reinforces one's impression that many Russians are not addressing the challenges of a greatly altered situation in imaginative, forward-looking ways. Instead they are clutching at the symbols and certainties of Russian statehood as proclaimed during the Tsarist era and conveniently encapsuled in the history books of those days.

By now the schools have absorbed the many revelations about the abuses of the Soviet period. No one is eager to go on exposing the atrocities, the falsehoods, and the mismanagement of the CPSU and its leaders. That is a healthy sign. But what is worrisome is that in paying quits to the Soviet period there is also the hazard, on the school level at least, of ignoring the solid achievements of Soviet historians, of not putting them to good use. Not all scholars were abject servitors of the state. There are excellent, objective works on diplomacy (by Eugene Tarlé), on political history (Pyotr Zayonchkovsky), on economic life (Boris Ananich), on historiography (Nikolay Rubinshtein)—to mention but a few names. Yet sad to say, too little of this achievement is considered as providing substantive material for present-day teaching.

Finally, there is the continuing penchant for deterministic or sweeping philosophical explanations. Educators no longer subscribe to the Marxist concept of "formations," wherein history progressed inexorably toward socialism from the communal, to the slave-holding, through the feudal, then to the capitalist stages. But instead of accepting the great variety and unpredictability of historical events, too many teachers are looking for some substitute, for new "regularities." Not all regard the open-ended search as an enriching pursuit. They want history to provide students with another pattern that will guide the young and shape their world view.

In hankering for some general law or "regularity" to strengthen their instruction, many teachers find it in the new magic word—"civilization." It is fairly obvious why this formula should provide comfort to people with different political priorities. Democratic Russians interpret the concept primarily as Western, modernizing civilization and firmly believe that Russia belongs in that fraternity. Conservatives use it to legitimate their search for a distinctive Russian politico-cultural tradition that will enable the nation to find its own path without having to ape the West. For this reason they sponsor the publication of works by Russia's nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers, ranging from Konstantin Leontyev and Nikolay Berdyayev to Nikolay Roerikh, who defined the spiritual essence of Russian civilization.

Absorption with the uniqueness of Russian civilization provides Russians with a defense mechanism. At present, perhaps, they need this type of solace for self-preservation and a sense of identity. But such an approach to the nation's history can well have perverse effects in the long run. It is one

thing to teach young Russians to take pride in the great achievement of their writers and thinkers. It is quite another to emphasize, after the nineteenth-century poet Fyodor Tyutchev—as I heard a number of times—that Russia's historical personality cannot be grasped, let alone understood, by reason alone. This outlook denies the crucial role of critical thinking in liberal education. Ideally, teaching history in post-Communist Russia should combine the necessary love and respect for the fatherland with a critical understanding of its tragedies and failures, with a tolerant appreciation for other nationalities and cultures, and with the awareness that in the coming decades we all face many common local and global problems.

A Modest Proposal

To conclude with a typical Russian question: What is to be done? Specifically, what can Americans, the West—the outside world—do to help Russian educators meet the challenges of democratic nation-building?

To be sure, the Russians have to solve their problems by themselves and find their own ways to answer the myriad questions about their past and future. No foreign model or prescription will help the Russians find their post-Communist identity—to sort out whether they belong to the East or to the West, or whether they form some distinct Eurasian or specifically Russian entity.

Nevertheless, as I was visiting schools, talking to students, teachers, and administrators, I was constantly aware of how few resources they had at hand in their search for possible answers or interpretations. The new books are expensive—over 100 rubles for a photo-offset edition of Klyuchevsky's university lectures, for example. And even a top-notch school, well-equipped with computers, could afford but one copy of this liberal historian for its library. Students who are encouraged to do their own research and thinking have no place to look up

the needed information. The Russian National (formerly Lenin) Library, the equivalent of our Library of Congress or the New York Public Library, is off-limits for them. The fine Historical Library in Moscow grants access to only a few, and its limited resources cannot satisfy the growing demand. Some independent, free libraries are opening in private apartments. The ones I was able to check out tend to be supplied by Russian émigré organizations that have a heavy religious, monarchist or nationalist cast.

In these circumstances, it would make sense for the Western world to sponsor a social studies library in Moscow and other cities, where teachers and students could freely browse, do research, get fresh ideas and solid information. The books need not all be in foreign languages or translations. Far from it. There are excellent Russian and Soviet historians whose works are not easily available or are too expensive.

As for Western books, what is sorely needed are standard encyclopedias, some sampling of good history textbooks, works on anthropology, comparative politics, sociology, modernization theories, historiography, and multiculturalism. I took along a dozen copies of our *Federalist Papers*. The democratic parliamentarians in the White House were well familiar with it. But it was a novelty at all the schools.

Surely, the Russians need more than fast food outlets or computers to create an open society, shape democratic institutions, and chart a new course. And especially the young need varied and nourishing food for the mind.

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CORRECTION:

Due to a technical error, the table on page 27 of Edward W. Walker's
"Post-Sovietology, Area Studies, and the Social Sciences" (*Forum*, Feb.-Mar. 1993)
appears without credit. Dr. Walker's table is a modification of material published
in Paul Hirsch, Stuart Michaels, and Ray Friedman, "Dirty Hands' versus 'Clean
Theory': Is Sociology in Danger of Being Seduced by Economics?" *Theory and
Society*, 16 (1973), pp. 317-36.

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